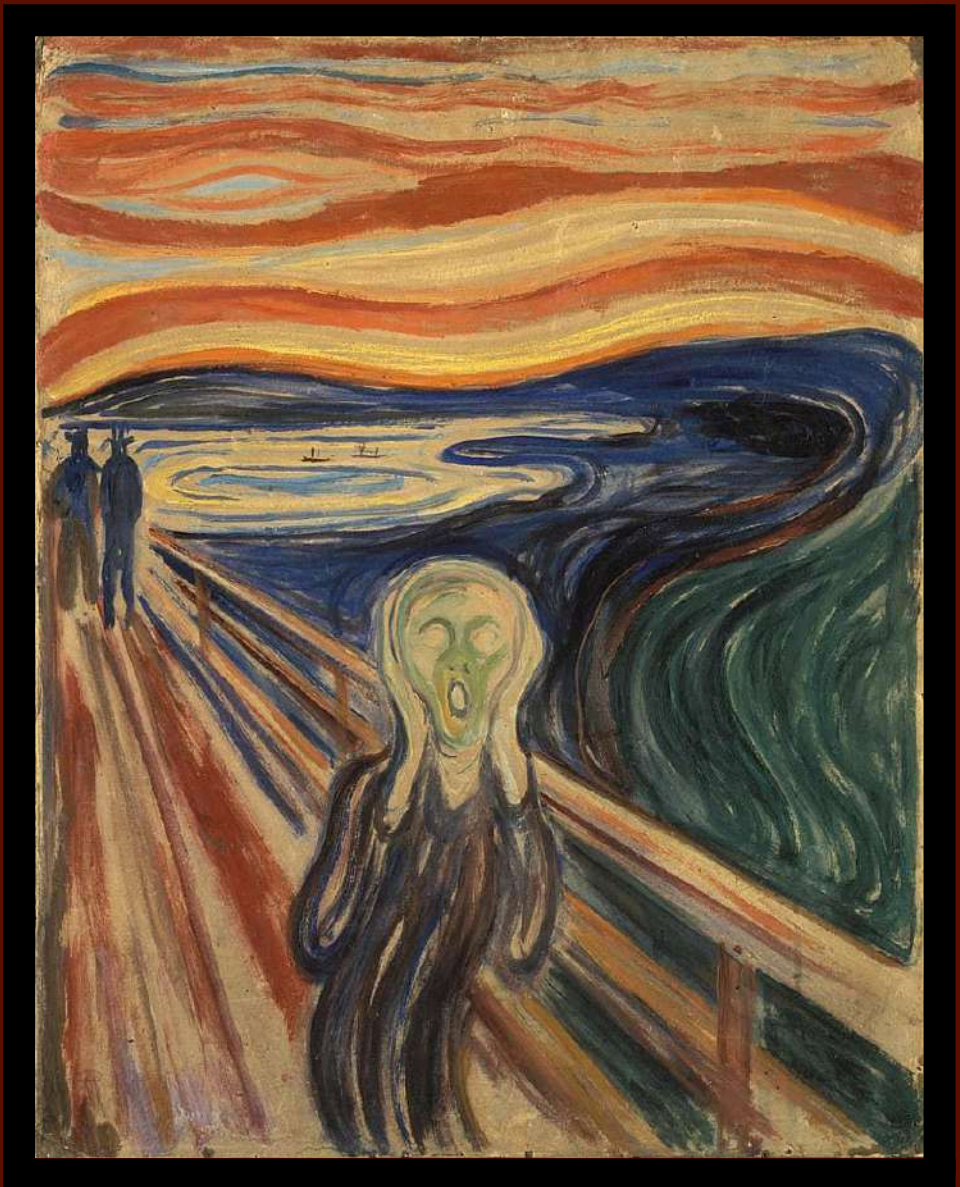
The Scream

Opinions yelled by students.



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WHO ARE WE?

We are The Scream. A collective of writers who are students with opinions. Uniquely positioned to comment on art and culture from the perspective of youthful hope and nascent naïvety.

WHY ARE WE?

We believe we have something different to offer. We are yet to gain, rightly or wrongly, too much cynicism. We are not a regurgitation of mainstream thought. We are not the stagnant rag of pop culture gossip. We offer the thoughts of students, for all who listen. We provide a voice for a group without. We let them Scream.

WHERE ARE WE?

Parklane Campus. Park Lane, Woodhouse, Leeds LS3 1AA.

WHEN ARE WE?

Every two weeks until summer.

JOIN US.

If you have opinions and are willing to write, join us and SCREAM. Message B610818 for details.

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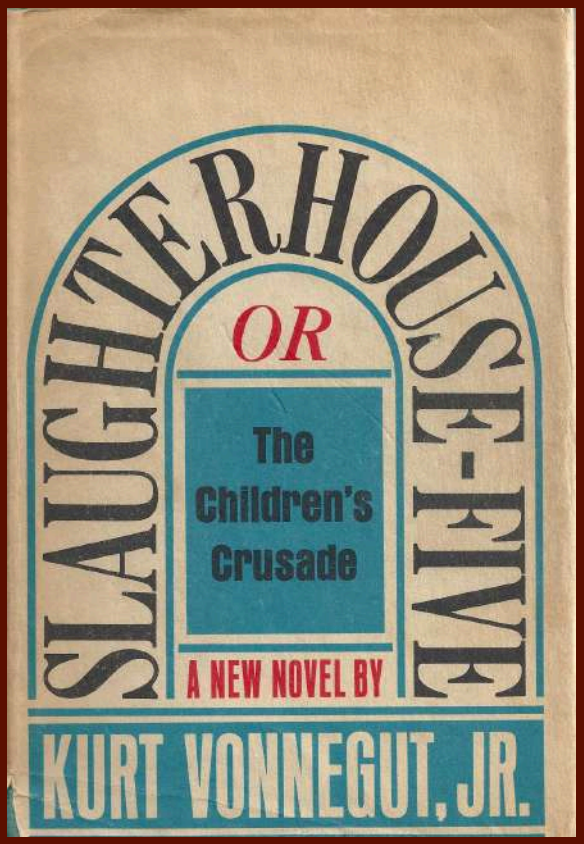
Slaughterhouse-Five, The Gaza Strip, and the ways through which we view massacre.

By Aurora Heyes.



(Left) Slaughterhouse-Five First Edition Cover. Photograph: Paul Bacon.

"There is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds.

And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like Poo-tee-weet?"' -Kurt Vonnegut

If you have been following the news at all over the past 16 months, you are probably familiar with the ongoing situation in the Gaza Strip. Since October 7th of 2023 Israel's continual occupation and killing has resulted in the deaths of approximately 62,000 Palestinian men, women and children. Many voices have spoken on the events through newspapers and television, oftentimes those speaking do so through a clinical shield, far away from the horrors which they debate the circumstances of. Those hearing them from Gaza seem to remember what they do not: 62,000 people are now dead. During an intense crisis, there are many onlookers who are able to become lost in the details as it were, to not recognise the terrible loss of life that the people of Gaza have been suffering, to forget that after a massacre, everybody is supposed to be dead, and it is very quiet.

One of the most famous stories concerning massacre is Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five. Released in 1969, Slaughterhouse-Five details the journey of the World War Two soldier Billy Pilgrim, as he gets "unstuck in time" experiencing all of his life in a manner lacking linearity or cohesion; he is flung from one part of his life to another, one moment he is comfortably working as a strip mall optometrist, the next he is watching a man die of gangrene in a freight car. "He is in a constant state of stage fright, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next." The book states. Billy is most frequently thrown back into his experiences as a soldier during the bombing of the German city of Dresden, reoccuring like a nightmare. But as Billy is thrown around time and space, his experience witnessing that bombing seems to take priority within this state of flux.

(Above) The Alter Schlachthof (Old Slaughterhouse) where Vonnegut sheltered from the bombing of Dresden. Photograph: Adam Jones.

Over a few days in mid february, 1945, in what was called a “firestorm”, the allied air forces dropped such a large number of bombs, that many major sources differ on the exact number by ranges in the thousands, causing the death of approximately 25,000 people, and leaving the city in a desolate state of rubble. Just like his terrified protagonist, so too did Vonnegut witness this bombing, parts of the novel being an analogous semi-autobiographical retelling of what he saw during his trip to wartime Europe, and similar to Billy, Vonnegut makes it clear he mentally returns to that time frequently.

Throughout the novel, whenever a death occurs it is followed by the phrase “So it goes.” A mantra that Billy Pilgrim picks up during his abduction by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore after he returns home from the war. The Tralfamadorians view time non sequentially, being able to view any particular moment at their leisure. ‘When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in a bad condition in that particular moment,’ Says Pilgrim, ‘Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I simply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is "so it goes."’ The Tralfamadorians help Billy Cope with his nature as a man out of time who cannot escape a period of his own life, that his existence of stagefright is bearable, because all those people he saw die in the war are simply alive in another place, that the deaths of all those people he witnessed was okay, because he can simply look at another moment in time when they were still alive. From this he comes to an epiphany: “Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt”. People often misunderstand this quote, reading it as Vonnegut making a statement on the eternal beauty of life, and that if you go looking for that beauty you will be content; in my opinion this is not the case.

The true nature of Billy's alien encounters is often thrown into question; his daughter treats him as mentally unwell due to his extra-terrestrial claims and he is kicked off a New York radio show for ranting about the Tralfamadorians. His own sanity is additionally drawn into question through his times spent in hospital. The first time is after he comes back from the war. PTSD stricken, he spends most of his stay in the veterans hospital hiding underneath bed covers and calling himself crazy. The second is after a violent plane crash. During this second incident, the ward he recovers in is also home to an old man fond of war stories, the man talks to Billy about the bombing of Dresden. Soon after, Billy tells the world about Tralfamadore. Whether Billy is telling the truth, or lying to the world or himself, one thing is clear: the alien philosophy he has picked up from his abductors is wrong. Despite his insistence to himself that it is okay and nothing hurts, he still exists in his constant terrified state, he cannot escape experiencing those events in Dresden on repeat, his only way to cope is to shield himself and say "so it goes", to create a barrier of comfort between himself and all the death he witnessed, a barrier that falls apart every time he sees the bombs fall.

On February the 14th, 1945, Billy Pilgrim emerges from the meat locker inside which he has been taking shelter from the bombs. He sees buildings that were standing days earlier, now they are burnt out husks, missing their roofs and windows, devoid of life. He sees charred corpses strewn all around him, lying on the ground, burnt beyond recognition. 'It was like the moon,' says Billy Pilgrim. Over the next couple of days, Billy is forced to work as a "corpse miner", he digs into the moonscape surface looking for the dead. He digs up rotting corpse after rotting corpse, each smelling worse than the last, fellow miners tear themselves to pieces, throwing up and throwing up over the stench, soon the gross number of human bodies call for mass burnings to efficiently dispose of them all. Despite his attempts at shielding himself, despite the mantras of the Tralfamadorians, Billy Pilgrim cannot tear himself away from this moment in his life, his "unstuck" nature will not allow him to escape the overwhelming amount of death he had seen.

It is very quiet in Dresden that day. The
Once-people do not speak; No one does.
Except for the birds, all the birds can say is "Poo-tee-weet?"

Slaughterhouse-Five was published in 1969, during this time a war was raging in Vietnam, fueled on the notion that the wars they fought were always just, the United States of America sent approximately 2.2 million men to another country in order to kill people. During this war, massacres were committed against the Vietnamese people. Pesticides were sprayed onto their homes, bombs were dropped onto their villages, towns and cities. Men women and children were indiscriminately killed. Vonnegut was living through this moment in history and used his book to draw parallels to the bombing he witnessed, and the acts the public were assured were acceptable through their television screens, newspapers and radio broadcasts.

(Above) Van Ha 1, A Việt Cộng village, 1966. A baby is born in a man-made cave. Photograph: The Courier Journal/Bill Strode.

On the 7th of October, 2023, the state of Israel sent soldiers into the Gaza strip with the goal of killing people, and as such approximately 62,000 men women and children have been killed. The mainstream news media of the United Kingdom, as well as much of the western world has chosen to write stories about Israeli hostage deals and responses to questions of circumstances, to focus on the side of Israel, and politicians such as former United States president Joe Biden have spent their time assuring the public that it is just to send more weapons shipments to the country. Recently a BBC documentary called "Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone" was released. It is narrated by a 14 year old called Abdullah as he guides the audience through the ground level terror he has been experiencing. The BBC has been urged to pull the film from their streaming site due to the teenage narrator's fathers work as the agricultural minister for the Palestinian governing body. It is not to say people have not tried to bring attention to the human plight. While they are few and far between, articles have been written detailing what life is like for those living in the shadow of death, and social media sites such as Tiktok and Instagram have given Palestinian people a way to make their voices heard in an environment that wishes to smother them.

(Left) Palestinians look for survivors after Israeli airstrikes in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, Monday, Oct. 16, 2023. Photograph: AP Photo/Fatima Shbair.

Generally, over the past 16 months, the attitude of the general media cycle is tantamount to the overwhelming mantra of "so it goes"; a comfortable barrier put between the people dying every day, and the way in which they are discussed, or the lack of such ways. If you spend even a little time looking at what has been happening, you will realise what this barrier does; that the comfortable distance provides space in which onlookers can separate themselves as humans living in the same present time as this atrocity, that they can instead say "Everything is beautiful and nothing hurts". If you went through what these people have been going through, you, like Billy Pilgrim would not be able to escape the inescapable reality in those moments of tremendous loss of life.

On the 15 of January, 2025 a ceasefire was agreed on between Israel and the ruling body of Gaza, known as Hamas. This is quite obviously a good thing, but it is a fragile peace; Israel has threatened a return to "intense fighting" if what is left of the other side does not comply, and the current president of the United States has repeatedly stated his wish to ethnically cleanse the residents of Gaza, the first stage of which being displacement. But for the time being, many places in Gaza are very quiet, because there is no one left in those places to say anything. Despite this current quietness, the genocide of the Palestinians is not over, and it is not the end of their struggle.

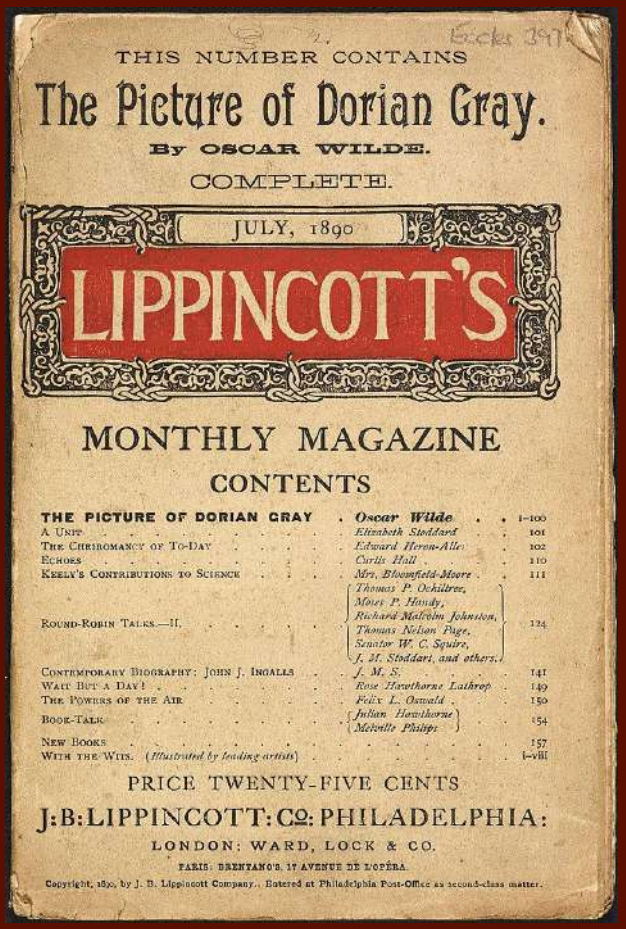
When Slaughterhouse-Five released, it was able to draw attention to the conflict in Vietnam, the way it was being discussed, and the people being massacred, through the lens of a previous event. I believe this book is still able to tell us something about how we are shown death today, and how onlookers see it. Do not be one of those silent onlookers, do not let everything be quiet, do not say "so it goes", and do not let the world forget what is going happening to the people of the Gaza Strip.

Would Oscar Wilde Say That Modern Morality is Just Boredom in Disguise?

By Sidney C. Gray

Oscar Wilde had little patience for moral crusaders. He saw them not as champions of virtue but as dull, frustrated people who found meaning in controlling others. He famously wrote, “Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike,” and it is difficult to argue against the idea that much of what we call morality is really just resentment dressed up as principle. If Wilde were alive today, he would likely see modern moralizers—whether progressive activists who cancel people on social media or conservative traditionalists who decry every cultural shift—as operating under the same impulse. They are not, in his view, driven by a true passion for justice or righteousness, but rather by their own unhappiness. A person who is truly at peace does not need to police others. It is only those who are dissatisfied with their own lives who demand obedience from the world.

(Right) A picture of the cover of the July, 1890 edition of Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, where "The Picture of Dorian Gray" was first published. Photograph: Elmer Holmes Bobst Library


THIS NUMBER CONTAINS

The Picture of Dorian Gray.

By OSCAR WILDE.

COMPLETE.

JULY, 1890

LIPPINCOTT'S

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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This was the essence of Wilde’s critique of Victorian morality. He lived in a time when the appearance of virtue mattered far more than actual goodness, where the people who screamed the loudest about sin were often the most corrupt behind closed doors. Wilde himself was a victim of this hypocrisy when he was convicted and imprisoned for “gross indecency,” a thinly veiled punishment for his homosexuality. The very judges and politicians who condemned him were part of a society rife with secret affairs, hidden vices, and moral contradictions. The rigid ethics of the time were not about fostering kindness or compassion but about maintaining control. Wilde saw through it all, and his works are filled with characters who mock the artificiality of such moral posturing. Lord Henry Wotton in The Picture of Dorian Gray speaks with Wilde’s own voice when he declares, “The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing.” Wilde understood that morality, when used as a tool of repression, leads not to virtue but to bitterness, and that those who spend their time condemning others are often the ones who have the most to hide.

If he were alive today, Wilde would see little difference between the moralists of his time and the self-appointed guardians of virtue in ours. Social media has made it easier than ever to turn moral outrage into a form of entertainment, and nowhere is this more apparent than in cancel culture. Every day, someone is accused of violating some evolving code of conduct, whether by making an offensive joke, expressing an unpopular opinion, or simply failing to keep up with the latest ideological demands. Of course, there are times when moral accountability is necessary, and Wilde, despite his reputation as a hedonist, was not indifferent to questions of justice. But he would have recognized that much of what passes for morality today is little more than people finding pleasure in punishing others. Wilde's Victorians found their entertainment in public shaming, in courtroom trials that destroyed reputations, and in gossip that ruined lives. Today, we see the same phenomenon play out on X (formerly Twitter), where mobs gather to denounce a person they have never met for reasons they barely understand, all for the fleeting satisfaction of feeling morally superior.

But it is not only the left that engages in this performative moralism. The right has its own version of it, and Wilde would have laughed at how little has changed. Conservative moralizers rail against modern decadence, claiming that society is being destroyed by feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, or declining religious values. They speak as though they are the last defenders of civilization, yet their rhetoric is filled with the same hysteria that defined the Victorian moral panics Wilde so despised. Just as 19th-century prudes clutched their pearls at the idea of women wearing slightly shorter dresses, today's reactionaries declare that drag queens are corrupting children, that liberal values are leading to moral collapse, and that anyone who does not conform to their vision of the past must be silenced. Wilde would have seen through this as well. He would have recognized that much of this conservative outrage is not about real moral concerns but about fear—fear of change, fear of freedom, fear that other people are living more exciting lives than they are. He would have pointed out that those who rage the most about so-called degeneracy are often the most obsessed with it, just as the men who condemned him in court were the very ones who spent their nights indulging in the very things they denounced in public.

(Below) A member of the Westboro Baptist Church, a religious, anti-LGBTQ+ group, protesting gay rights in New York. Photograph: Monika Graff.

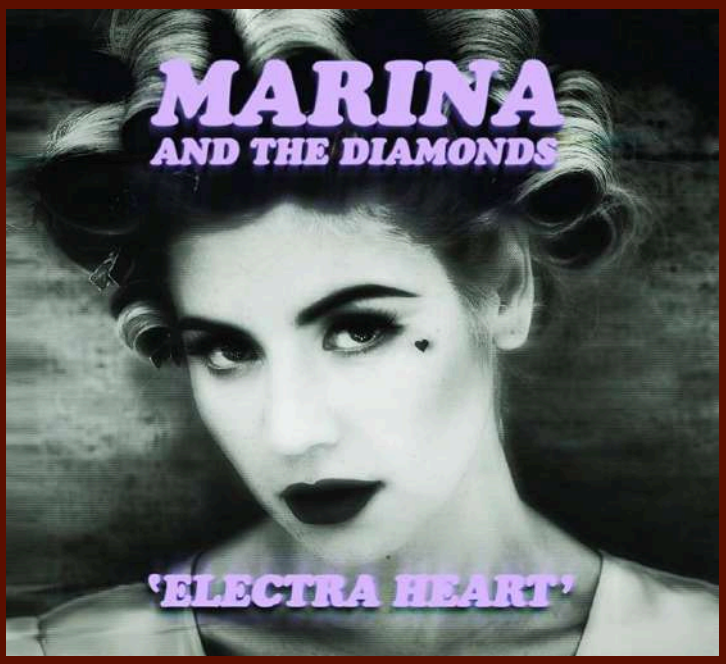
Wilde's greatest insight was that true morality is not about control but about joy. He believed that life should be lived fully, that beauty and pleasure were higher ideals than rigid moral codes. He did not argue for selfishness or cruelty—he was, after all, deeply sensitive to human suffering—but he did reject the idea that virtue must always be tied to repression. In Lady Windermere's Fan, he writes, "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." This is the philosophy that guided him: an acknowledgment that no one is truly pure, that we all have flaws and desires, but that instead of trying to drag others down into misery, we should aim for something higher. The happiest people are not the ones who spend their time enforcing morality on others. They are the ones who pursue art, love, humor, and freedom.

It is no coincidence that the people who dedicate their lives to moral policing, whether on the left or the right, seem to be the most miserable. The anger, the resentment, the constant search for enemies—these are not the behaviors of fulfilled individuals. Wilde would say that if a person truly enjoys their life, they have no need to dictate how others should live. He would look at modern progressives who cancel people over decade-old tweets and modern conservatives who rage against changing social norms and see the same impulse at work. It is not justice they seek, nor is it true virtue. It is control. It is the satisfaction of punishing others. And most of all, it is a way to distract themselves from their own lack of fulfillment.

If Wilde were alive today, he would not spend his time engaged in online moral battles. He would not be drafting long threads about who should be canceled, nor would he be ranting about the decline of civilization on some conservative podcast. He would be writing, drinking, laughing, falling in love. He would be embracing life, as he always did, and he would leave the moral crusaders to their bitterness. Perhaps that is the lesson he still has to teach us. A person who is truly happy has no interest in making others miserable. And those who devote their lives to policing others are often simply looking for an excuse to hide from their own unhappiness.

Electra Heart: An Omnipresent Modern Classic

By Damon Midgley and Tamzin Rowe



(Left) Electra Heart (Deluxe) Album Cover. Photograph: Atlantic Records.

Some albums have a tendency to creep into your life without you even noticing. Such is the case with Electra Heart (Deluxe) by MARINA, known until recently as Marina and the Diamonds. You might not remember the name of the artist, you might not recall the names of the songs, but somehow, the lyrics and melodies are already etched into your mind.

Maybe it was the omnipresence of *Primadonna* in the early 2010s or the viral resurgence of *Bubblegum Bitch* on TikTok, but the second these songs kick in, you know them. There's an uncanny sense of familiarity, like finding a friend from your childhood that you never knew you had. This is the magic of Electra Heart. It wasn't just an album - it was a movement, a mood, an aesthetic that imprinted itself on an entire generation.

The Concept: A Tragic Pop Opera

MARINA is not just a singer-songwriter; she's a storyteller, and Electra Heart is the most ambitious narrative she's attempted. The album documents the titular character's rise and fall; a persona MARINA created to explore themes of love, identity, heartbreak, and power through the lens of American archetypes: The Primadonna, The Housewife, The Beauty Queen, and The Homewrecker. It's a concept album masquerading as a shiny pop record, but beneath the glittering production lies a biting critique of fame, consumerism, and perfection.

What makes Electra Heart so brilliant is in the duality of the surface value collection of infectious pop anthems which, at the same, is laced with irony, self-awareness, and tragedy. MARINA embodies these personas not for their own sake but to dissect them; hence, the album was both an ode to and dissection of pop culture.

Iconic, Unforgettable Songs

From the outset with *Bubblegum Bitch*, it is very apparent MARINA is here to make an assertion. This track is brazen, snotty and full of attitude - a detonating explosion into the realm of Electra Heart. Guaranteed you've heard the song somewhere even if you have never actively gone out of your way to

find and listen to it: through a meme, in a TikTok edit, playing in the background of some YouTube video. It's that type of song that sticks to your memory, and you aren't even aware it's there.

Then there's *Primadonna*, arguably the album's most famous track. It's the kind of song that makes you go, "Wait, I KNOW this song," even if you've never consciously listened to MARINA before. With its grandiose production and playful, narcissistic lyrics, *Primadonna* is both self-indulgent and self-aware.

Songs like *Lies* and *Starring Role* go to the dark side of love and self-esteem. *Lies* is a haunting electronic beat that seems to paint disillusionment, while *Starring Role* is a sad anthem for every person who feels like a side character in his or her relationship. These tracks show MARINA can balance vulnerability with biting commentary for deeply personal resonation.

(Above) Primadonna Single Cover. Photograph: Atlantic Records.

Teen Idle is probably the most emotionally raw moment on the album and, for sure, my personal favorite; it's a melancholic reflection of wasted youth, opportunities missed out, and the impossible expectations placed on young women. Lines like, "I wish I'd been a prom queen, fighting for the title" and "I want blood, guts, and angel cake," speak to that existential crisis so well-how growing up gets in the way when one wishes to live in a world valuing aesthetics rather than substance. It's the kind of tune that stays long after it finishes, echoing for anyone who feels lost in search of this hypothetically perfect lifestyle.

The deluxe edition deepens the album even more with tracks like *Buy the Stars* and *How to Be a Heartbreaker*. The latter, being the closing track on the album, really is a huge contrast from the rest of the record. While most of Electra Heart is introspective and filled with heartbreak and critique of society, *How to Be a Heartbreaker* is an upbeat, cheeky number that flips the norm established in the album. Where before she's the one bruised, now she's the one playing the game. It's a switch in tone that allows the album to conclude on an unexpected yet surprisingly perfect note.

So why is Electra Heart an album you know, even if you don't think you do?

This has partly to do with its absolute cultural relevance - the aesthetics of Electra Heart, pinkly feminine, a tragedy but glamorous - made for a framework upon which this generation of people, especially women, would lay the foundation in Tumblr-era pop culture. These personas, the sad girl, the misunderstood queen, a girl who's asking to love but refuses weakness, are all embedded deep in the DNA of Electra Heart. These characters struck a chord across a generation mapping their identities along the lines of social media perfectionism.

Another reason would be its lyrical relatability. MARINA has this innate ability to put words to emotions that just feels universal, whether it's the desperate need for validation in *Primadonna*, the

frustration of feeling replaceable in *Starring Role*, or the existential longing in *Teen Idle*. Even if you didn't seek out her music on purpose, it found you because these feelings are things we've all felt at one point or another.

Finally, the record has had something of a really surprising revival these last few years, considering something like TikTok encourages this type of dissemination: Bubblegum Bitch and How to Be a Heartbreaker single-handedly took over going viral, taking a new generation into the depths of Electra Heart. What a testament it is to her songwriting abilities that ten plus years after dropping, the record still feels rather relevant, rather fresh and deeply personal.

Closing Remarks

(Left) Electra Heart (Platinum Blonde Edition) Album Cover. Photograph: Atlantic Records.

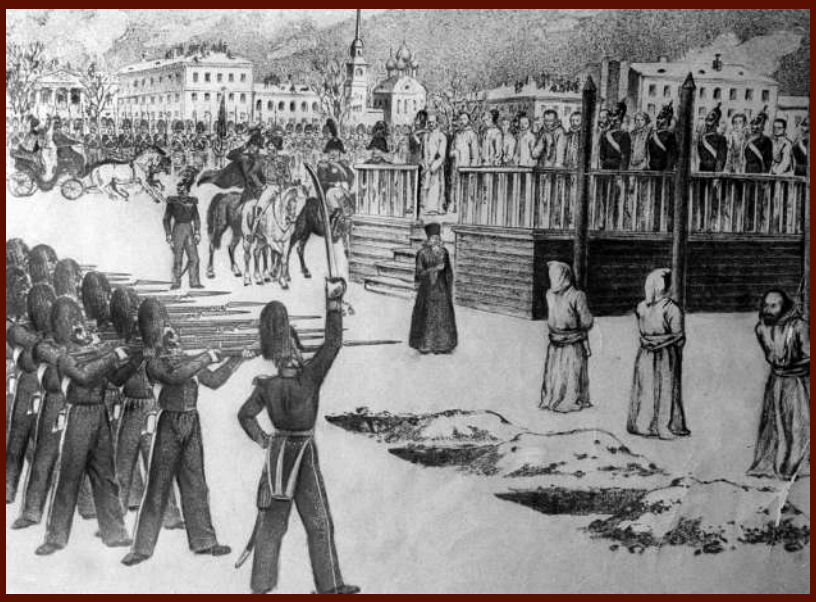
Electra Heart is an album, an era, a statement, and, above all, the deeply personal journey that is encased in the shell of pop perfection. A record that sneaks up on you well before you can realize: humming along to melodies one can't quite recall learning and identifying with lyrics one never knew were needed.

Personally, I found the album to be an all-around fantastic experience. The introspection, irony, and irresistible pop production make it one of the most compelling records of its time. And how it closes with *How to Be a Heartbreaker*, a song that completely contrasts with the rest of the album, only adds to its brilliance. It leaves the listener with a sense of irony, a final wink from Electra Heart herself.

Whether you found it way back in 2012 or stumbled upon it more recently from some viral TikTok trend, Electra Heart remains a defining piece of modern pop. And if you find yourself singing along to *Primadonna* or *Teen Idle* without knowing exactly how you know the words-well, you're not alone. That's just the power of MARINA.

Dostoyevsky Would Say that True Freedom is the Right to Suffer

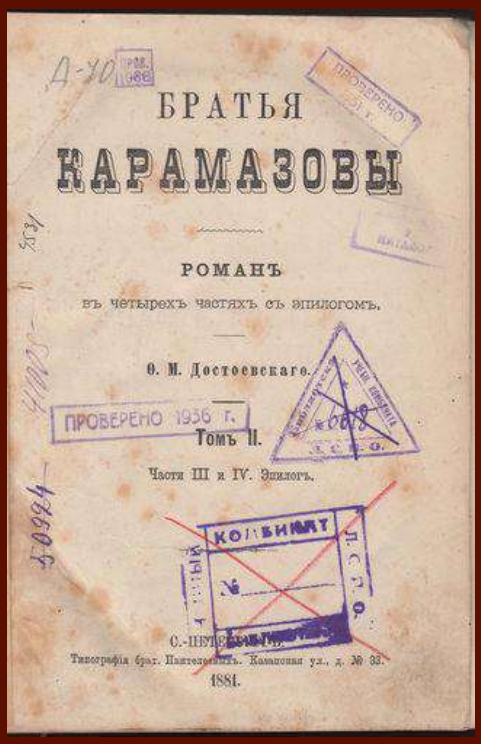
By Sidney C. Gray



(Right) A sketch of the mock execution of Dostoyevsky and his 'collaborators'. Photograph: B. Pokrovsky

Dostoyevsky understood suffering, not as an abstract concept or an intellectual exercise, but as a brutal and inescapable force that defines human existence. He did not theorize about it from a comfortable distance. He lived it. He stood before a firing squad, believing he had only moments left to exist, only to be pardoned at the last second. He spent years in a Siberian labor camp, surrounded by criminals, reduced to a number, enduring conditions designed to break him. He buried his wife, his brother, and his child. He suffered through epilepsy, financial ruin, and a gambling addiction he could never fully escape. His life was marked by pain, but instead of running from it, he wrestled with it. He thought about it, wrote about it, and reached a conclusion that many today would find unsettling: suffering is not just an unfortunate part of life. It is necessary. Not because pain itself is good, but because suffering forces us to confront who we are. Without it, we remain shallow, untested, incapable of real depth.

This idea is almost offensive to modern sensibilities. We live in a time that treats suffering as a problem to be solved, an obstacle to be removed. We censor speech to shield people from offense. We create "safe spaces" to insulate them from discomfort. We push for ideological purity, not out of a love for debate, but because we are terrified of uncertainty. At every turn, we seek to eliminate struggle, to smooth out the rough edges of life. And yet, we are not happier. We are more anxious, more lost, more fragile. Dostoyevsky would have seen this for what it is. Not kindness. Not progress. Fear. A fear of hardship, a fear of confrontation, and ultimately, a fear of freedom. Because real freedom is not about comfort. It is not about safety. It is about having the right to suffer, to face difficulty, to confront the raw truth of existence without someone stepping in to protect you from it. A person who has never suffered may live a painless life, but they will never become strong. They will never understand themselves. They will never be truly free. Freedom without suffering is an illusion, a gilded cage that offers security in exchange for the very thing that makes us human.



(Left) The Brother Karamazov First Edition Cover. Photograph: Sigedon Ars Memoriae.

In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoyevsky lays this fear bare in the Grand Inquisitor parable. Christ returns to Earth during the Spanish Inquisition, but instead of being welcomed, he is arrested. The Grand Inquisitor tells him that he made a mistake. He expected too much from people. He wanted them to be free, to struggle with their faith, to find their own way. But people do not want that. They want security. They want someone to take the burden of choice off their shoulders. They do not want freedom. They want to be taken care of. This is what Dostoyevsky feared most. Not dictators. Not government oppression. The real danger is that people want to be controlled. They will give up their freedom voluntarily, not because they are forced to, but because they are afraid of what real freedom demands. The Grand Inquisitor tells Christ that the Church has corrected his mistake. It has given people what they truly want, not freedom, but comfort. Not responsibility, but certainty. And for that, they are willing to obey.

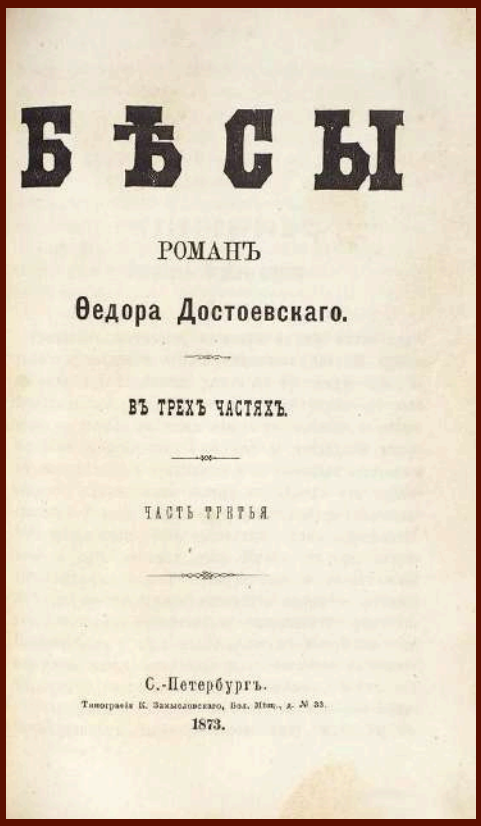
Look around today, and it is impossible to ignore how relevant this warning has become. People are afraid of difficult ideas, so they demand censorship. They are afraid of being offended, so they expect institutions to shield them. They are afraid of uncertainty, so they latch onto rigid ideologies that promise all the answers. This is not freedom. It is a comfortable prison. And the worst part is that people embrace it willingly. They do not see their submission for what it is because it is disguised as morality, as progress, as the pursuit of a better world. But Dostoyevsky saw through this deception. He understood that the desire to eliminate suffering is, at its core, a desire to eliminate the struggle that makes us human. He knew that suffering is not simply an unfortunate side effect of life but the very force that gives it meaning.

Dostoyevsky saw this impulse clearly in Notes from Underground. The Underground Man mocks the idea that humans can be made happy by perfect social conditions. He sneers at the belief that if we just engineer society correctly, people will be peaceful and content. He knows that even if you gave people paradise, they would destroy it just to prove they still had a choice. Because at the core of human nature is not a desire for comfort. It is a desire for agency, for self-determination, for struggle. And struggle always comes with pain. This is why utopian visions of a world without suffering are doomed to fail. Humans are not meant to exist in a state of perpetual comfort. When life becomes too easy, too predictable, too sanitized, people do not flourish. They wither. They become weak, complacent, unable to confront reality. And so, they seek out struggle. They manufacture new problems, new conflicts, new sources of suffering. The Underground Man understands this, but modern society refuses to.

The push for safe spaces, the obsession with avoiding offense, the belief that speech itself can be violence—these are all attempts to deny the basic reality of existence. Life is difficult. Ideas are uncomfortable. Growth requires struggle. But this does not mean suffering should be inflicted for its own

sake, nor does it mean cruelty is strength. Dostoyevsky did not glorify pain—he understood it as a crucible. The moment we try to eliminate all hardship, we do not create a stronger, happier, more fulfilled generation. We create people who are weaker, more dependent, more incapable of standing on their own. This is why Dostoyevsky would have been horrified by 'cancel culture'. The idea that people must be publicly shamed, cast out, erased for expressing the wrong opinion is not about justice. It is about fear. The belief that if we just remove enough "bad" people, we will finally have a perfect society is the same utopian fantasy Dostoyevsky tore apart in his novels. It is the Grand Inquisitor's logic all over again.

Because what is really happening? People are giving up their intellectual freedom. They are allowing social movements, institutions, and online mobs to decide what they are allowed to think and say. They convince themselves that ideological purity is necessary, that policing language and punishing dissent will make the world a better place. But this is not progress. It is submission. It is the same pattern Dostoyevsky explores in Demons, where Pyotr Verkhovensky manipulates his followers into believing that total surrender to the revolutionary cause will bring justice. His followers, desperate for certainty, give up their individuality. They embrace the cause, not because they understand it, but because it relieves them of the burden of thinking for themselves. And the most terrifying part? They do not just tolerate control. They want it. Dostoyevsky understood this dark truth about human nature. People do not simply accept control when it is forced upon them. They crave it. They want to be told what to believe, how to act, what is right and wrong. Because that is easier than freedom. Real freedom means uncertainty. It means responsibility. It means suffering. And most people would rather be comfortable than free.


БѢСЫ

РОМАНЪ

Ѳедора Достоевскаго.

ВЪ ТРЕХЪ ЧАСТЯХЪ.

ЧАСТЬ ТРЕТЬЯ.

С.-Петербургъ.

1873.

(Above) Front Page of Demons, First Edition. Photograph: Tipografija K. Zamyslovskogo.

This is why suffering is so important. It is not something to be eliminated. It is something to be confronted. It is something that forces us to grow, to question, to change. Modern culture tells us suffering should be avoided at all costs. That happiness comes from protection, from insulation, from control. But Dostoyevsky would tell us the opposite. He would say that suffering is the price of being truly alive. A world that prioritizes comfort over struggle will not create stronger people. It will create weaker ones. A person who has never faced hardship has never truly lived. A society that fears suffering is a society that has lost its soul. So the choice is ours. Do we live as pets in a comfortable cage, safe but unfree? Or do we suffer, struggle, and embrace the chaos of existence as free human beings? Dostoyevsky would urge us to choose suffering. Because in the end, true freedom is not about avoiding pain. It is about having the right to face it head-on.

The Identity of Names and Titles with Metal Gear Solid

By Zekhel R.

In my opinion, there's few games that have as strong a grip on their central core themings than *Metal Gear Solid* (MGS). The game series, beginning with its debut release of the same name, along with its trademark 'tactical-espionage action', struck the video game history books in 1998 and was immediately a smash hit. You played as veteran super soldier and grizzled spy Solid Snake and, in doing so, infiltrated the mysterious 'Shadow Moses', battled invisible cyborg ninjas, sabotaged tanks and took down helicopters, all while pursuing your high-stakes mission to save various hostages on the mysterious island. The title had at-the-time revolutionary stealth mechanics that still hold out almost three decades later - but what really cemented the game into the upper echelons of entertainment was its in-depth storytelling, far ahead of most other releases of the same time in a year as influential as '98 (which saw the release of other classics as 'Resident Evil 2', 'Half-Life' and 'Ocarina of Time' for the action-adventure/stealth shooter MGS had chosen to brand itself as, it completely exceeded expectations in it's story elements.)

(Below) From 'The Art of Metal Gear Solid' by Yoji Shinkawa. Photograph: Konami/Yoji Shinkawa

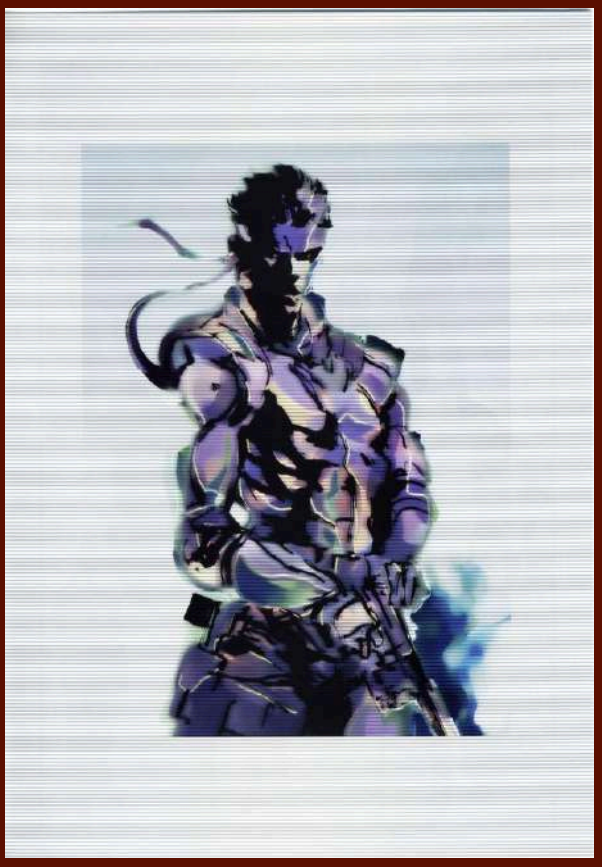
"It had a big impact on my life and was an incredibly groundbreaking game when it came out."

- David Hayter, voice of Snake, on Metal Gear Solid 1

With surprisingly rich and noteworthy political themings, a detailed storyline with multiple converging plot points, incredibly written characters that offered so much more than their story-serving archetypes would indicate and a resounding ending that leaves the player wondering how our hero will ever continue on, truly, the creative vision of this first game paved the way for what would become well-received norms within the franchise, and it's sequel which foretells of the fast approaching digital age of the newly turned 21st century is worthy of an article in of itself. And while this combination of Rambo-meets-James-Bond spectacle pushed the PS1 to its limit, needing two separate discs for the full game (back when we still needed physical media to hold our games.) This is all just what's in your face - what's told to you outright and directly if you care enough to not repeatedly button-mash your Playstation Controller's *'start'* button to skip all the dialogue, no, what really enamoured me with the series was the one

constant that's always there no matter how far you zoom out to look at the series' (extensive) catalogue: Snake.

I know, I know. That doesn't really narrow anything down, there being five people who've all individually taken the codename of 'Snake' in one way or another through-out the series, (and then one Raiden, who used the codename briefly for part of a mission.), but that's exactly my point. One of the series' themes that's its creator Hideo Kojima has included in every main title is a 'passing of the torch', from the sometimes literal passing of genes onto a new generation of soldiers, to the more figurative inheritance of names, titles, and the legends that they carried with them. In the eight main releases through the *Solid* franchise, this single theme remains a constant along with the title of a 'Snake' and for good reason.



(Right) "Solid Snake" by Yoji Shinkawa. Photograph: Konami/Yoji Shinkawa

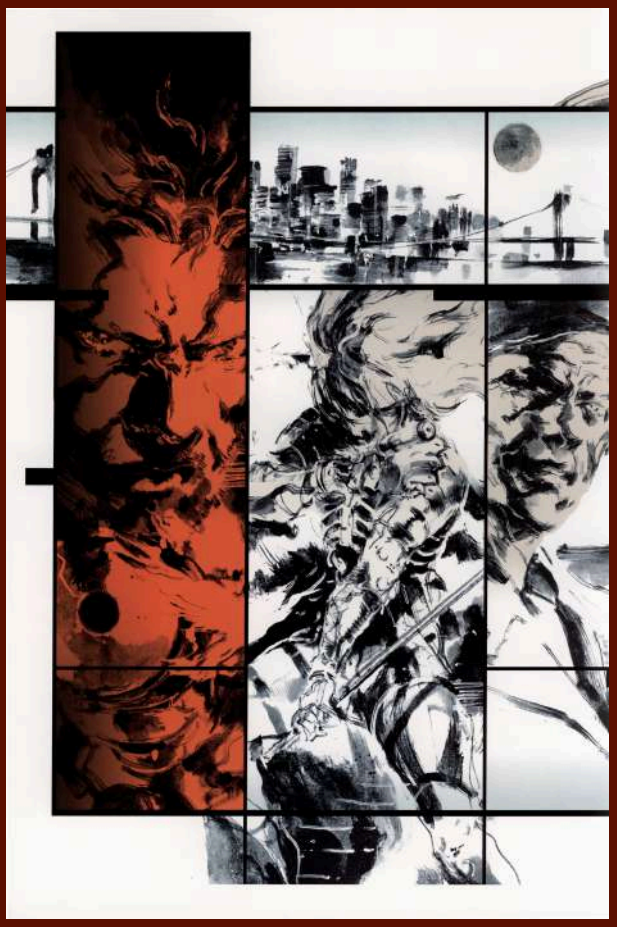
"Are you Solid Snake?"
"That's what some people called me."
"The legendary Solid Snake...! You!?"

- *Meryl, a character in Metal Gear Solid 1, realising the spy she's been conversing with is Snake.*

Our story starts, from the player's perspective, with battle-hardened 'Legendary Hero' David, referred to only by his codename: Solid Snake, and while we're not told right away how he obtained the moniker, we get the sense that he has done much to contribute to its reputation; he's cemented his name and forever tied it to his actions and massive achievements as both soldier and spy, most heavily referenced when characters bring up how he dealt with an incident in a place called 'Zanzibar Land' (from MGS' 1987 ancestor simply named *Metal Gear*) along with being a member of the special force unit almost as iconic to the game as Snake himself: Foxhound.

By the time the player picks up the first game, Solid Snake already has a reputation tied to his name far before the mission that takes place - a legacy of sorts that's already reminisced by characters as the stuff of legends, immediately elevating himself to an 'only man for the job' type of figure, and while we weren't there for all of his past achievements, there's a sort of awe we see him naturally command from whoever he reveals himself to in the game. He is indeed shown to be an impossible man doing impossible things, and, due to this, he gives the title of 'Snake' the same impossible standard of a perfect soldier completely detached from his own identity of David, this battle-focused idealism directly causing most events of the next game…

(Below) From 'The Art of Metal Gear Solid 2' by Yoji Shinkawa. Photograph: Konami/Yoji Shinkawa



"Snake, you can say that because you're a legend. But I'm Jack the Ripper; a terrible reminder of a dirty mistake."

- *Raiden, who would briefly assume the codename 'Snake' for part of the Big Shell Incident in Metal Gear Solid 2.*

We start our next journey in the game's direct sequel, *Metal Gear Solid 2* (MGS2), with a new protagonist, Jack, a soldier who bears, by no accident, immense similarities to Solid Snake. Molded from a young age to be a perfect soldier rivalling that of the original Snake, he was put through extensive Virtual Reality (VR) Training that replicated numerous missions that Solid Snake had been on, including the events of the first game. By no coincidence, Jack also soon finds himself as the spearhead of his own special operation to a similar impact as that of the Shadow Moses Incident that took place in the first game.

And while the franchise's first game had no problem demonstrating the reputation that Solid Snake had garnered for both himself and the title, the second game in particular gives us a distinct feeling that the title of snake *means something* to others when given to them; an immense pressure and weight being placed on Jack as he, too, is given the title 'Snake' for the first half of the Big Shell Incident.

What sticks out, though, is that this Snake (Jack) tries to *act* like Solid while on his own mission, he's heard of the 'Legendary Hero' of course, and his demeanour fluidly changes to fit the responsibilities that this inheritance of names means. A core theme of Jack's character is the finding of his own identity and his tendency to assume the characteristics of others in a failed attempt to do so, and the assumption of Snake's codename was essential for his personal development regarding this, to eventually realise that he's *not* snake *or* just the weapon he was made to be, but his own person.

By the midpoint of the game, Solid Snake does make his return, and takes the title back from Jack, now dubbed Raiden, who, with the guidance of his idolized hero, begins to find his true self beneath his conditioning as a soldier and beyond his found hero figure in Snake. It's all eventually revealed by the end of MGS2 that the entire thing was a carefully orchestrated test of sorts for Raiden, with one of its purposes being recording his responses to create an even better simulation for another generation of perfect soldiers akin to Solid. Raiden then allies with Solid Snake to take down another man who claims the Snake codename: Solidus Snake (still keeping track?) to thwart his dastardly evil plan of… saving America from an age of digital censorship and allowing true freedom and democracy to exist in an increasingly corrupt world? Yeah, Metal Gear Solid 2 was weird for 2001, but at least it had some good quotes.

(Right) From 'The Art of Metal Gear Solid 2' by Yoji Shinkawa. Photograph: Konami/Yoji Shinkawa

"What is our legacy if we cannot pass the torch? Proof of our existence - a mark of some sort. When the torch is passed on from parent to child... it extends beyond DNA; information is imparted as well. All I want is to be remembered. By other people, by history."

- *Solidus Snake, the antagonist of Metal Gear Solid 2.*

But… those are only the people who've *adopted* the title of Snake, who've been given it, one way or another, and while their individual stories are a masterpiece of writing, where did it start? Where did the name really come from and gain its (in)famous reputation?

That takes us to the next released game in the series, *Metal Gear Solid 3* (MGS3), but it turns the story's clock from 2012 back to 1964, where CIA special operative John, known as Naked Snake (for his tendency to deploy into missions without gear) or simply Snake, drops into the Soviet Jungles to perform the *Virtuous Mission* and *Operation Snakeater*, becoming known as the first 'Legendary Soldier' as he saved his country from a nuclear crisis.

Retaining his codename up until almost the very end of the game, Naked, much like his successors, completed a seemingly impossible mission under improbable odds, but became heavily disillusioned from the way his government operated in the process.

After the *Virtuous Mission* sees John's mentor '*The Boss*' defect the Soviets, *Operation Sneakeater* has him redeploy into enemy territory, spanning 3 days, John completes hostage recovery-turned espionage and sabotage objectives, inspiring his team back home, including his Commander, '*Zero*' who took note of his successes, and his opponents on the field alike, specifically Soviet Soldier Revolver Ocelot. By the end of it, however, he is given the soul crushing directive of assassinating The Boss herself, which he also completes.

In doing so he inherits her title– her *name* of *Boss,* and the endless cycle of battle that comes with it. Only after the completion of *Snakeater* does John gain the knowledge that all of The Boss' orders, including her supposed defection, were orchestrated by the CIA, and that she had carried out her directives to the end.

(Left) From the 'Metal Gear Solid Portable Ops Artbook' Photograph: Konami

"Everything she did, she did for her country. She sacrificed her life and honor for her native land. She was a real hero. She was a true patriot."

- *Naked Snake, Metal Gear Solid 3.*

Shortly after the incident, John would establish *Foxhound* (not to be confused with the FOX Unit), however, the event would deeply affect John, who would begin to slowly become radicalised to what his mentor's dying wishes, '*The Boss' Will*' of "one world without borders." He would slowly come to completely reject the name of Snake, eventually coming to embrace his inherited name of *Boss* or *Big Boss* as the years went on, he commanded the group Foxhound up until 1972, where he left both the group and the CIA to form *Militaires Sans Frontières* ("Soldiers without borders") to further pursue these objectives, as well as learning that Zero, afraid that Big Boss would eventually turn against his country, had cloned him three times in a project called *Les Enfants Terribles* to raise more of the 'perfect soldier' (surprise, Solid and Solidus Snake were clones the entire time!) these two factors solidified his decision to separate from Foxhound entirely, where he would indeed cause many problems for America over the course of 20 years, including the *Zanzibar Land Disturbance (1999)* and *Outer Heaven Uprising (1995)*, both of which were handled by then-Rookie Foxhound member and Clone son, Solid Snake, who unknowingly adopted his 'Father's' codename, leading us right back to Solid Snake and *Metal Gear Solid (1)*

In the chronological end of the *Solid* series, which takes place in *Metal Gear Solid 4* we see Solid Snake for the last time, still operating under his codename, overthrow the antagonistic shadow bureaucracy which keeps the world in a constant state of warfare. He's incredibly aged despite only 2 years passing from the events of Metal Gear Solid 2, as the cloning process that created him rapidly increased the clock on his development, he appears to be in his late forties or early fifties.

At the end of the game, after successfully ending the shadow government known as 'The Patriots' and the War Economy they perpetuated, Solid Snake, who is not far from dying himself, visits a the Grave of The Boss and encounters a far older Big Boss, minutes from death (Lots of bosses, huh?), with Big Boss having been believed to be dead, they initially draw their arms on each other, but Big Boss drops his gun, effortlessly disarms Snake and embraces him. Snake, who learns of the Boss' impending death, listens to him as he encourages Solid to not spend his last moments fighting, and to live in the new free world beyond his codename, beyond 'snake'. As a real person instead.

(Above) Solid Snake (Left) and Big Boss (Right). From 'Metal Gear Solid 4' Photograph: GamesRader+

"I never thought of you as a son, but I always respected you as a soldier... and as a man. The Boss said there's only room for one Snake, but no, the world is better off without them. That new world is yours to live in. Not as a snake, but as a man."

- *Big Boss to Solid Snake, 50 years after Operation Snakeater, reflecting on The Boss' words and directly challenging the idea of 'Snake' operatives.*

And that covers the legacy of the 'Snake' codename, there are some outliers of course, such as 'Liquid Snake' and 'Venom Snake', but neither had the same permanence or continuity as the other snakes. The three snakes and one Boss that I mentioned are what really draws me into this franchise, those legacy of names are what I think truly makes the story nothing short of brilliant, a passing of the torch, an inheritance, a reminder.

When it's all said and done my mind keeps coming back to one piece of dialogue in the series that takes place in the early moments of Metal Gear Solid 3.

"What's your name?"
"Snake."
"No, not that name. You're not a snake, and I'm not an ocelot. We're men with names. My name... is Adamska. And you?"
"John."
"Plain name. But I won't forget it."

- *Revolver Ocelot to Naked Snake, Metal Gear Solid 3 & The inspiration for this article.*